The Present Overflowed: The Making of “Real-Time” Interaction in *true*

Rino Sato

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the question of “the present” in performance, especially in relation to the question of spectatorship. I do this through an analysis of an actual performance piece entitled *true*, with a particular focus on the concept of “real-time interaction” which plays an essential part in the piece. This analysis will show how the “real-time interaction” in *true* constitutes two different and yet inseparable realms of “the present”; one is the present as an absolute, unconditional moment of “now,” and the other is the present as a relativized, conditional mode of temporality. In order to reveal how these dual aspects work upon our spectatorship in *true*, I will analyze the concept of “the present” referring to Martin Heidegger, whose insight into the concept of time helps interpret the intricate temporality in the piece, as well as to Henri Bergson, whose speculation on our perception of the present opens up the possibility of alternative spectatorship. In conclusion, this paper will show how the concept of “the present” constitutes a magnetic field of intersection between visibility and invisibility, where our experience of “the present” at the site of a performance becomes impossible and yet necessary.

1. Introduction

“Performance’s only life is in the present,” writes Peggy Phelan in her essay entitled “The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction.” If live performance is saved, recorded, or documented, it becomes something other than performance. As untiring improvement in media technology has turned to better preservation and documentation, the “past” becomes more accurate, useful, and even brilliant than the “now” in our modern world. Performance art, according to Phelan, has become rare and unusual in still clinging to the concept of the “now.” This ontology touches on what practitioners of “performance art” have always claimed as their property in order to distinguish their art from any other forms of representation. Since the establishment of the genre “performance art,” the very idea of irreversibility
of performance’s time and space has been explored by many artists for their own politics as well as aesthetics. On the part of the audience, too, nothing would better describe the essence of spectatorial experience than taking hold of this fleeting moment. The sensation of “here and now” constitutes the enthusiasm, exhilaration and intimacy that live performance alone can offer, the idea that “a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward.”

Thus Phelan’s statement makes an open declaration of the present as unexchangeable and supreme, without which death takes performance away to the economy of reproduction.

This fanatical commitment with the present, however, coincides with relativization of it among other temporalities, for Phelan’s ontology also suggests that performance’s life announces itself only when disappearing into the past. Provided that its appearance is grounded on the realm of disappearance in the incessant time flow, performance inevitably accepts the past in the overwhelming present.

Having these two different, if not utterly contradicting, propositions on the ontology of performance—one speaks more about the actual perception and sensation at the site of performance, and the other more about the theoretical insight—demands consideration, for it implies that our spectatorship has two different realms of understanding, divided between direct, corporeal experience and mostly indirect, speculative reflection. I would not examine here whether such division itself is valid or not. But my suggestion is that if such division or separation remains unconsidered, we would be left with a fruitless framework of binary opposition between theory and practice, thought and act, and ideal and reality when we speak about performance. Rather, let us have an opportunity to stand in the midst of these two aspects in relation with the performance’s “now,” the overwhelming, absolute mode of experience on the one hand and the relativized, conditional mode of epistemological understanding on the other, both of which carry a respective significance of a performance’s life. Expected is a possibility of alternative spectatorship which should extend its influence to a whole field of performance including a field of practice, for, in fact, spectatorship in the deepest sense is that which lies in every person involved in performance, no matter whether one is a performer or a member of the audience. For this purpose I examine in this paper a performance piece entitled true. The reason why I chose this piece is, precisely speaking, that it is a piece overflowing with “now.” In other words, this overflow carries me to a magnetic field of the present with the various effects as outlined above. How can one’s spectatorial experience survive beyond or longer than an actual performance’s life? This is the question I would like to investigate throughout this paper.

### 2. Visible Real-Time Interaction: At the Site of the Performance

true is a collaborative dance piece by three artists: dancers, Takao Kawaguchi (Dumb Type) and Tsuyoshi Shirai (AbsT/baneto), and the lighting designer, Takayuki Fujimoto (Dumb Type), who is also the director of the piece. It was performed in New York City in November 2008, following its world premiere in Japan in 2007. “Dumb Type” and “AbsT/baneto,” both of which are the Japan-based performance collective, have already established an international reputation in recent years. They are especially renowned for the nature of the stage: physical, conceptual, and aesthetic experimentation combined with innovative incorporation of multimedia technology. My firsthand experience of true did
not in the least contradict such a reputation. Within the piece could be found physical dialogues between the two dancers, aesthetic interplay between bodies and images, and even conceptual speculations achieved through various multimedia technology which manifests itself on the stage. At the recognized level at the time of viewing, true was a piece of dance performance beautifully realized through the use of various technology such as lighting, digital images and auditory transmission. The technology in fact enhanced the immediacy between the stage and the audience. Sound, light, and even vibration are transmitted simultaneously with the dancers’ kinesthetic movement. If one can call this kind of mediated perception “real-time interaction,” true was undoubtedly a performance of real-time due to its dazzling presence and undeniable visibility. It was not until later, however, that I noticed the piece should be called more so because of its invisibility than because of its visibility. The piece true was a performance of real-time interaction because real-time interaction was so invisible and so unperceivable to us that this invisibility itself must be considered. I might as well say that real-time interaction doubles in the visible and the invisible, which absolutizes and undoes “the present” at the same time. Before entering into a detailed discussion of this point, let me first describe in greater detail what I experienced—the visible part of real-time interaction—during the performance of true.

On November 14th 2008 I saw the performance of true which had opened on the previous day in midtown Manhattan, where Japan Society has a small theater with fewer than 300 seats. Entering the auditorium, I saw that the stage was simply arranged: a rectangular wooden table was set on a white floor with a large screen hung in the background. A bottle of water, a mug, a globe of about 30 cm in diameter, and several other small items had been placed casually on the table. On both sides of the stage scaffoldings, reaching from the floor to the ceiling, and sharply framing the stage, had been erected. A doughnut-shaped lighting apparatus hung suspended from the center of the ceiling.

Shirai announced the opening of the performance by stepping onto the stage. He was dressed simply in a grey shirt and shorts, and he was barefoot. He moved to the table and examined the items on it. Every movement he made was followed by strange phenomenon: noise that occurred as he picked up the silverware and flickering light as he tried to drink the water. Eventually he could not make any gesture without causing some spectacular side-effects. Thus in the first few minutes of the performance, the audience noticed the simultaneity between bodily movements and such mediatized effects, so that they began to perceive the sound and light as an extended form of his bodily movements.

In contrast Kawaguchi entered on the upper level of one of the scaffoldings wearing a red raincoat over a dark business suit. He stood there for a while, looking down on the floor. By this time, Shirai had been caught up in more supernatural phenomena: the mug moving by itself, a shadow running through the surface of the globe, and suddenly, something falling off of the wooden table—it was a large portion of the table top as if the table top itself broke off and fell on the floor! Previously neat and clean, the stage was now cluttered by lifeless, and yet uncontrollable objects, as they moved and spread out on the white floor. As time went on, more and more audio-and lighting effects were added to enhance the tension on the stage. Finally, Kawaguchi descended to the floor, joining Shirai. Shirai looked like an innocent boy, while Kawaguchi, appeared to be a masterful, somewhat cruel, adult man. In this piece, instead of a series of aesthetically, calculatedly choreographed movements, the “dance” consisted of their kinesthetic
interactions. These kinesthetic interactions were diversified and complicated through various mediatized interventions: the scaffoldings on both sides of the stage began to shake; the doughnut-shaped light above center stage began to blink; and a set of images on the upstage screen began to appear and disappear. All of these interventions were immediately turned into multisensory forms of bodily movement for the audience to simultaneously watch, hear, and feel. Since I was sitting in the front row of the theatre, this multisensory dance absorbed me entirely with all of my senses. The audience was given a new way of understanding the performance by the blinding, thundering, and tingling dance. In fact in this performance in New York, Japan Society had even distributed to the audience free earplugs in case they felt the noise from the performance to be too loud. After watching this performance for about 60 minutes of performance, and not having used the earplugs after all, I found myself to be somewhat exhausted from having all my sensory organs stimulated by these multisensory effects. But this exhaustion exactly speaks of the essence of live performance.

Having made a kind of lengthy description of the performance, however, it seems impossible for me to offer a summary or synopsis in terms of a narrativizing perspective. Although the piece was divided into nine scenes—Introduction, Science, Music, Physical Education, Verbal Skills, Social Studies, Drafting, Math and Survival—these scenes were not organized into a story as a whole. Also the relationship between Shirai and Kawaguchi remained ambiguous. They sometimes seemed to be a teacher and a student, and at other times a father and a son, or an executioner and a captive. They seemed to have antagonized, neglected, or cooperated with each other. The piece did contain verbal elements—but these verbal elements were absorbed into other effects in order to be “heard” or “watched,” rather than semantically interpreted. The piece left substantial effect on our eyeballs, retinas, and eardrums, and from which I cannot construct any literary or contextual understanding. Indeed, this was the core of my first-hand experience of true: maximization of bodily (organic) understanding and minimization of contextual understanding.

I have to admit that it was occasionally somewhat difficult to keep up with such a conceptual performance when my understanding of it failed to figure out any context. But as a whole, this difficulty did not spoil the excellence of the dancers, the effects, and the “real-time interaction” that I perceived. Perhaps it was my lack of “dissatisfaction” with the piece that drew my attention to the New York Times review of true, which openly criticized the performance. For Claudia La Rocco, the critic of the New York Times, the phenomena and movements seen in true were uselessly decorated with “bells and whistles,” and she contended that true was nothing more than “[t]echnology without theatre.” Perhaps it was the same kind of illegibility and ambiguity that I had felt during the show that led her to conclude: “[s]urrounded by all this silliness and hindered by ineffectual choreography, the men don’t have much hope of making an impact.” This poignancy surprised me somewhat, and I even sensed disappointment or anger in her review. Then I found the reason for her strong comment. Citing the names of artists from the program, including the members who were responsible for mechanism support and programming, as well as the director and the dancers, and she then complained that the technological results were “all too meager.” At that moment I understood that true had in fact used more technology than I had previously thought. The term “myoelectric sensing” found in the article was particularly unfamiliar to me. But if, to
follow La Rocco, the results of the technology were all “too meager,” did it really influence my viewing of true even though I had adequate knowledge of the technology used in? Perhaps not. But rather than discrediting my experience, I began wondering why the results of the technology were so invisible. Should anything be unevaluated merely because it was unseen? What if the invisibility itself speaks of something important when such invisibility is outstanding?

3. Invisible Real-Time Interaction: After the Performance

This is how I started examining material and information concerning true, which I did not do before watching the show. In fact, it was only by chance that I saw the performance of true because I was given a ticket one day before the performance by an acquaintance. Consequently it turned out to be my first opportunity to see a Japanese theatrical production outside of Japan, after a six-month stay in New York City. Even though I had arrived at the theatre 20 minutes before the performance began, I was absorbed in observing the audience rather than reading the program, because I wondered what kind of people would come to see a Japanese contemporary dance in New York. This kept me from obtaining a detailed explanation of the piece in advance, especially regarding the technology being used in the performance. But later, the more I read about the piece, the more attractive true became to me, in spite of the fact that the performance was over. What I read urged me to reconsider what I did and did not see during the show; how the invisible, along with the visible, constituted the performance; and what spectatorial experience means in the face of such invisibility. All these questions converge on the question of real-time interaction, which is the essential part of true. Just as a realm of real-time interaction is doubled by the question of in/visibility, so should the concept of the “present,” be opened toward a dynamic field of multiple meanings.

Now in taking up those issues, I look into my firsthand spectatorial experience in the light of the discovery I made afterwards. Let me start by reexamining what I actually did see during the show along with the question of visibility. First of all, what does the title true mean? In the production note the director, Fujimoto writes;

Many so-called facts and realities we believe to have indisputable, objective external existence are actually generated within ourselves day by day, minute by minute. Furthermore, much of the sensory data we think we receive has actually been self-filtered before it reaches the brain. When these processes are clearly demonstrated, we may re-examine our relationship to the world we thought was predetermined and beyond any possibility of change.7

Here, the title true itself takes the shape of a question, rather than making a proposition about what truth is, and Fujimoto’s emphasis on the constructedness of a reality explicitly takes on a phenomenological and epistemological portrayal of the world: a reality created by our perception. He also suggests that our perception is never unmediated, but inevitably intervened by the multi-layered social contexts and conventions of everyday life. This implication accounts for the absence of recognizable
context and background in true, which, in daily life, inevitably necessitate our interpretation and analysis of the situation. Instead, this absence unblocks such understanding and literacy from what we perceive, so far as we are kept from interpreting it in terms of our conventional framework. With such awareness of socially and culturally biased “reality” suggests Fujimoto, we see a possibility of overcoming our sense of alienation from the world. Survival, in this sense, only comes after we obtain this kind of awareness. Fujimoto’s statement helps me reflect my experience in true to a certain degree, one that my sensory reception surpassed my reasoning. Activated sensory organs, unshadowed by contextual or literary understanding, might very well create an alternative spectatorship as well as a renewed understanding of how we perceive a performing body. The real-time interaction which I actually perceived during the show played an important role in creating a dazzling sensation of a dispersed body as it announced itself in the flashing light, sound explosion, and aerial vibration simultaneously. Our viewing of this simultaneity in true is essential in our perception of a body’s multiple existence, enabled by the visible real-time interaction. Combined almost synonymically with simultaneity, however, the visible real-time interaction delimits its own potentiality as a critical practice especially in relation with the concept of the present. It does at best enhance our sensation of “here and now,” which has always been cultivated and thus already familiar to us in the art called performance. In order to carry further this very sensation of the “here and now,” the absolutized present demands consideration.

Therefore my next examination turns to the invisible real-time interaction which is physically imperceptible yet critically, quite visible and indispensable for our truly renewed understanding of the present, the now at the site of performance. Here the information about media technology including “myoelectric sensing” (the term I unexpectedly came across in the New York Times) takes on great importance. I found on the Internet a report written by Kazunao Abe, the curator at YCAM (Yamaguchi, Japan) where true was premiered.

According to the information in the report, LED lights were installed in the doughnut-shaped apparatus I saw in the performance at the center of ceiling. The LED light is widely known for its convenience to be applied to stage lighting as it requires less electric power and less equipment than usual lighting apparatus. But in this piece true, the LED light was used not so much for its practical merit as for the excellence of its own performance: the changeability in its electric current with the exceeding speed. With LED light, one is able to turn the lighting on and off with shorter intervals than a split second, which would not be possible with other types of electric light. Such a shortened interval does not interrupt the flow of the movement when LED light is supposed to be a part of dance with its simultaneous interaction with the dancers. By reacting at the speed of the quickest movement of human’s joints and muscles, LED lighting can represent the kinesthetic quality so as to be recognized as an electric and yet physical movement of dance. But how is it possible to connect the performance of the LED light with that of dancers? Then, a myoelectric sensing plays an essential part. A myoelectric censor is a kind of sensing device that can process electric signals coming from the muscle tissues of the human body. Its most remarkable characteristic is that it does react not to the muscular movement itself, but to the brain signals which send muscles an order to move. In true this censor was attached to each dancer’s arm and it caught and processed the very brain signals when the dancers were about to move. Then the censor
transformed signal into a sound signal to send out to the various media, including the LED light, through the transmitter. Combined with the LED lighting, this myoelectric sensing could thus realize the greatest quality of real-time interaction that had ever been available. The sound signal processed by myoelectric sensing was also transmitted to the scaffoldings on both sides of the stage, making them shake with a deafening noise.

Having read all the description about the technology employed in true, I realized how the real-time interaction was made possible. At first these descriptions were merely impressive, letting me know that the piece had been unexpectedly technologized. But soon I began wondering why this performance had to be so technologized. If technology was deployed in order to just visualize the real-time interaction between dancers and other media, it seemed to have gone beyond its purpose. In fact I was able to see the real-time interaction in this sense, in spite of not having prior knowledge about the technology used. Couldn't they have created the same kind of production, for example, having some technicians operate the sound and other systems in a way that corresponds to the dancers’ movement, instead of dealing with such an imperceptible thing as the human brain signal, or using such time frame that is shorter than a split second? The true effect of this technology remained invisible, imperceptible, and unrecognizable even after having read about them. Yet this technology has to be considered, if it had nevertheless to exist there. Then, how should one understand it?

In the report, Abe explains the “purpose” of the technology employed in true as follows;

If we understand the site of art as the very place where something is aesthetically “happening,” interaction between things should be real. Then mustn't we exhibit above all else what a reality really is, the reality constantly changing in its space and time before us? Here lies the significance of real-time interaction.9 [my translation]

It seems to me that there can be found the idea of “authenticity,” regarding the way the art is understood, as well as the way it is presented. Provided that this “authenticity” is realized through real-time interaction created at the site of performance, one would soon assume that scientific observation such as “shorter than a split second” or “brain signal” were deployed to make “interactions” as authentic as possible, in order to elaborate the accuracy of simultaneity by means of technology. If, to follow Abe, through such elaboration and purification of “real-time” interaction art can represent “the reality constantly changing in its space and time,” by realizing “real-time interaction.” Live performance can make its way toward the perfection as an art, and it sounds that, in front of this rigorous challenge, art would excuse its being art for art’s sake. Abe daringly suggests that in true, real real-time interaction devised by LED lighting and myoelectric sensing might become indistinguishable for the audience from fake real-time interaction, another possible option to represent the same kind of simultaneity.10 Indeed, it is theoretically impossible for human ability to appreciate a range “shorter than a split second” or “brain signal.” One would be reasonably angry if taking such a statement as arrogance or self-satisfaction as showed by the reviewer of the New York Times, who diminished such real-time interaction because the effects were too meager. Unless properly understood, the use of bells and whistles of the highest level
would end up wasting both money and time. Even if this opinion has merit, I am more attempted to take the other way to go. In apparent invisibility of the technology which was deployed to realize “real-time” interaction, there can be found the excess of passion, need, and desire to represent the “authentic” moment of “real-time.” Compared to this excessiveness, the fact that its result remains invisible needs to be considered more seriously than merely be accused of the invisibility.

In fact, what this excessiveness reveals is the very impossibility of real-time interaction. By launching the investigation as far as into the realm of “a split second,” true reveals the scientific limitation: however small and minute it may be, there inevitably exists an interval, distance, and delay between a dancer’s movement and the media effect. Even if using technology, one could minimize this interval as much as possible, but it will never cease to exist. By making its way toward perfection of interaction, the technology of simultaneity reveals the very impossibility of real-time interaction. This impossibility also encroaches the credibility of our experience of performance. Remember the idea that real-ness is always complicit with the “authenticity” of the art of performance, having sincere moment of “here and now” with the audience. This is the real-time interaction invisible enough to be materialized. With the visible part of real-time interaction, this invisible real-time-ness duplicates the realm of our spectatorship.

Indeed the invisible real-time-ness undermines, if not undoes, the visible counterpart in true for, the former implies that what we believe to capture in the latter—perception of body’s multiple existence—is ultimately an illusion. That sensation I got during the performance was closely related to an assumption of simultaneous perception made between the dancing body and the media effects, and the idea that multiply existing bodies in a single moment created a beautiful field of experience. But once I recognized the invisibility and impossibility within this field, it begins to take a new shape of experience. Our simultaneous perception of light, sound, aerial vibration and dancing bodies on the stage were in fact occupied with different modes of temporality—the past, the present, the future—never with the present alone. Various media effects we should have received simultaneously with the bodily movements were nothing more than the spectrum, reverb and trace, a deferred perception of the dancers’ will to move. Similarly, the dancing bodies on stage embrace the precedence of those media effects. Mathematically calculated delays between the occurrence of kinesthetic movement and generation of multimedia effects infuses into the simultaneity of their perceptions with various temporalities, so does an apparition of the performing body has the multiple temporality of the past, the present, and the future. In other words, the doubled real-time interaction portrays these three temporalities in linear ordering—from the past to the present, from the present to the future—but in spiral vortex of time, which prevents us from distinguishing each temporality. This vortex of different temporalities is that which Heidegger refers to as “time’s peculiar character.”

For Heidegger, time does not exist as linear configuration nor as a succession of nows but constitutes a melting point of various modes of temporality:

Approaching, being not yet present, at the same time gives and brings about what is no longer present, the past, and conversely what has been offers future to itself. The reciprocal relation of both at the same time gives and brings about the present. (Heidegger, 13)
Two pictures of time’s being, one suggested by Heidegger and the other by true, intersect here in terms of conceptualization of time as “indivisible.” Considering that Heideggerian formulation of time also involves a questioning of “presencing,” a mode of presence, the insight gained by employing this “indivisible time” as lens of analysis into the actual site of performance is significant, for it inevitably forces us to reconsider how in the performance, we understand “the presence.” The reason that Phelan’s ontology of performance, “performance’s only life is in the present,” has been exposed to numerous examinations and assessment again and again since its declaration is that it deals precisely with “presence” in terms of temporality. The strength of this ontology lies in the self-erasure character of performance that would not be possible without time flow, and in this sense, Phelan effectively invites “the past” and “the future” into “the present” in her thesis. Phelan’s formulation of “presence” in terms of temporality has thus been nurturing the field of performance studies and contemporary critical theory, putting the implicative concept of “body” into question. As Lepecki writes, this ontology means for a theory of the “body” that, “at the limit, presence might very well impress its mark upon the social field as that which promises dis-embodiment.” Then, if Heideggerian conceptualization of time found in true can offer some alternative insight to the amalgamate question of “presence” and “body,” it would be the very indivisibility of time, with its challenge against a linear mode of representation. The implication suggested here in true is that “the present” itself no longer constitutes the frontier or the limit of the performance’s being. Rather, just as seen in true, the past and the future are woven into our sense of simultaneity which we believed to be the present. Thus, the Heideggerian representation of time embedded in true secretly undermines the “authenticity” of the sense of the present, and the performance’s present thus reveals itself as an experience of the impossible. The “limit” of the performance would then become more complicated and indeed more porous site on which the body would not exist without being questioned more and more of its stability.

Interestingly, Heidegger’s distrust of the concept of time as calculable and measurable seems to resonate with his doubt of technology as a means of representation of time.

But time cannot be found anywhere in the watch that indicates time, neither on the dial nor in the mechanism, nor can it be found in modern technological chronometers. The assertion forces itself upon us: the more technological—the more exact and informative—the chronometer, the less occasion to give thought first of all to time’s peculiar character. (Heidegger, 11)

Employing up-to-date technology, true attempts to fulfill its excessive desire to represent real-time, only to reveal its impossibility. The power of this performance as a critical practice does inhabit such impossibility. Taking its place in the interplay between visibility and invisibility, true creates a site of the performance’s present potential for radical instability of presence, body, and the present itself in a way that ultimately poses a question on the credibility of our belief in “the present” in the performance, by making such an experience actual and powerful yet dubious and indeed, impossible.
4. Necessary and Impossible: Perception of "the Present"

What would our spectatorship become, then, when our experience of “the present” loses its credibility? Should performance art renounce its own claim to being the art of here and now, and we, the spectator, abandon our enthusiasm for “here and now”? Perhaps such is a fertile reductionism of our lively sensitivity and receptivity into theoretical field of contemplation, the visible into the invisible, the possible into the impossible. There would be no art called “performance art” as fertile, creative and political field of practice without overcoming such reductionism. In the face of its rigorous impossibility, our spectatorship never gives up our experience of performance as a “maniacally charged present.”16 In the last section of this paper, I take a further examination of the question of spectatorship, thinking how it is that we experience the present in spite of its impossibility.

The ideas of “here and now,” “maniacally charged present,” “real-time interaction” all speak of one’s absorption into “now” which Bergson calls “illusory form.”17 Bergson, who importantly shares the conception of time with Heidegger, analyzes it differently. He adopts a phenomenological perspective of the distinctive “now,” which enables us to imagine an alternative spectatorship.

For Bergson, time is not “measurable and therefore homogeneous.”18 Rather, time exists in “an organic whole,” in which the past coexists with the present, the one melting into one another. He calls this mode of existence of time “duration.”

Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. It need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then, on the contrary, it would no longer endure. Nor need it forget its former states; it is enough that, in recalling these states, it does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole, as happens when we recall the note of a tune, melting, so to speak, into one another. (Bergson, 100)

As Heidegger advocates the indivisibility of time, here Bergson holds the inseparability of time. But one would soon notice that in Bergson, the mode of duration is represented as the state of our ego and consciousness, rather than as something autonomous and external. In fact, Bergson admits that we have two different modes of perception of time, inside and outside our consciousness:

When I follow with my eyes on the dial of a clock the movement of the hand which corresponds to the oscillations of the pendulum, I do not measure duration, as seems to be thought; I merely count simultaneities, which is very different. Outside of me, in space, there is never more than a single position of the hand and the pendulum, for nothing is left of the past positions. Within myself a process of organization or interpenetration of conscious states is going on, which constitutes true duration. It is because I endure in this way that I picture to myself what I call the past oscillations of the pendulum at the same
time as I perceive the present oscillation. (Bergson, 108)

Here we notice a reflective description of Bergson’s experience in which he tries to explain how and what he sees through watching a clock. It is at this site of reflective observation that we can connect the experience of time with a question of spectatorship. Indeed, the “outside” experience, finding only “a single position” without the past, reminds us of the ontology of performance, the field of appearance. Also it is suggestive that Bergson names its outside perception “simultaneity,” as a mode of perception absorbed into a single position, which is very different from duration, the internal, heterogeneous temporality. If this simultaneity as a single position refers to a spectatorial moment of “the present” while the internal duration points to the incompatibility with such a singularized “present,” possible and the impossible, both of which constitute one’s experience.

As I mentioned earlier, Bergson calls such simultaneity attained in one’s external experience “illusory.” Similar to Heidegger, Bergson also thinks that time is neither calculable nor measurable, and such demarcation of time is never compatible with his understanding of duration as an “organic whole.” But Bergson goes further to explain why we do actually have such simultaneity in everyday life, and the reason is that, according to him, “a real space” does not have duration. For Bergson, “space” is that which is calculable, measurable and external to our consciousness, thus very opposed to “time.” (Indeed Bergson always tries to represent duration inside us.) In “space” governs the economy of visibility in which “the previous state” is distinguished from “the present one” only because the former is gone. Since our internal “time” coexists with the outside space, we are constantly affected by the external law so that we deal with the internal time *spaciously*, and arrange separately “the present,” next to “the past.” Hence, says Bergson, “the mistaken idea of homogeneous inner duration, similar to space, the moments of which are identical and follow, without penetrating, one another.” Bergson’s criticism against this false idea of duration confused with space, however, can also be read as this: the notion of spatialized time is an illusion, but only so when we are unaware that such is nothing more than our creation as a means of our negotiation with the external world. Once we become aware of its illusory nature, then, this spatialized time in which we can experience a simultaneity as the single present, should emerge as “the intersection of time and space” as a conscious linkage between the inside and outside where we can immerse ourselves in a single moment of the present, the absolute sense of “now,” not given to us unconditionally but created by ourselves as a means of communication. At the intersection of space and time as a site of conscious immersion into a single moment of “the present,” a spectator makes its experience both possible and impossible. This absolute yet suspicious commitment with the present is a possibility what I see through my understanding and examination on the piece *true*, that of alternative spectatorship that is visualized by exactly what I could not perceive, at Japan Society in New York, very site of the performance.

5. Conclusion

What does it mean to write about performance, if as Phelan says, “performance’s only life is in the present?” My viewing of the performance *true* is constituted of layers of numerous actual conditions
which surrounded me at that time in New York City. In a reflection, examination and analysis which necessary come after a performance and thus, already becomes something different in our memory, would never seize it as the same with the event itself. Therefore Phelan declares that “to write about the undocumentable document of performance is […] to alter the event itself.” 21 Indeed my writing, through time and space, is still going on and altering the performance even after returning to Japan. But it was not only the performance itself but also my own experience that is undergoing changes through the act of writing. After the performance, I discovered how impossible my experience was, among the dazzling spectacles produced by a collaboration between the highest ever technology employed and the beautiful fusion of kinesthetic and aesthetic performed.

Once again the statement by the director of true, Takayuki Fujimoto here: “we may re-examine our relationship to the world we thought was predetermined and beyond any possibility of change,”22 that is, a possibility for us to change the world. Then who are we to change the world and what is the world we are faced with? If the possibility of change comes to us when we realize that it is our perception that creates the world, what would be left for the world, to change us? The invisibility and impossibility revealed by real-time interaction in true offers a possibility of an alternative spectatorship when moment of “the present” makes us simultaneously enthusiasm and suspicion into it. This spectatorship casts one’s gaze not only over the world external to oneself, but also over the internal consciousness. This gaze upon over one’s own would undermine the credibility and certainty of our perception with which we perceive the world. But it is this uncertainty that does save a space within ourselves for the external world to visit and cause a change. The alternative spectatorship, in its experience making the possible into the impossible, and the impossible into the possible, must keep the very externality of the world to oneself. Then, the experience of “the present” in the performance, will truly emerge as a critical and creative intersection between the world and ourselves, as a site of communication, which should survive the performance’s life.

Notes
1 Phelan 147.
2 Phelan 149.
3 The English title of its piece does not capitalize the first letter.
7 Fujimoto, the project’s statement from the program. Available in the webpage: (http://www.baasbank-baggerman.nl/images/uploaded/68/editorial/id=801.pdf)
8 Abe, a curator’s report.
9 Abe, a curator’s report.
10 Abe, a curator’s report.
11 Heidegger 11.
12 Heidegger 11.

13 This idea of indivisible time for Heidegger is seen in his criticism of spatialized time, as in his distrust of numerically calculated time with a watch or chronometer. It is not possible for us to measure time unless we consider it in terms of spatiality. See On Time and Being.

14 Heidegger suggests that presencing is only possible by interplaying of different temporality, writing in On Time and Being:

What has-been which, by refusing the present, lets that become present which is no longer present; and the coming toward us of what is to come which, by withholding the present, lets that be present which is not present — both made manifest the manner of extending opening up which gives all presencing into the open. (17)

15 Lepecki 5-6.

16 Phelan 148.

17 Bergson 110.

18 Bergson 108.

19 Bergson 109.

20 Bergson 110.

21 Phelan 148.

22 Fujimoto, the project’s statement from the program.

Works Cited


